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SUBJECT: EDELMAN AND MOD HOLD PAKISTAN ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION, MAY 30

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connelly, reasons 1.4
(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, UK counterpart Ministry of Defense Policy Director Desmond Bowen, and their staffs held a wide-ranging roundtable discussion on Pakistan May 30. (Participants in para 6.) Bowen described Pakistan as "vital strategic ground," and the UK MOD plans to continue its work with the Pakistani military despite Pakistani hesitation. Although political engagement is complicated by President Musharraf's tenuous position, Pakistani ownership of its own internal fundamentalist threat is crucial, and the army needs to build its counter-terrorism capacity, even if its focus remains on India. Both the U.S. and UK agreed the Security and Development Plan (SDP) is the way forward. End summary.

"Vital Strategic Ground"

¶2. (C) In a wide-ranging roundtable discussion on May 30, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, UK counterpart Ministry of Defense Policy Director Desmond Bowen, and their staffs discussed their current engagement and strategies in Pakistan. (Full list of participants in para 6.) After Edelman outlined current U.S. thinking on Pakistan, Bowen described Pakistan as "vital strategic ground" for the UK, both for Pakistan's influence in the region and on the nearly one million Britons of Pakistani descent. Bowen outlined the MOD's four aims for Pakistan: 1) a partner in counter-terrorism; 2) economic self-sustainability, including food security and infrastructure development; 3) putting the Pakistani military "in the right place" as a force of stability; and, 4) a strong partner in democracy.

Difficulties with Engagement

¶3. (C) Edelman and Bowen agreed that there has been significant Pakistani push-back to receiving support from the West, especially since such partnerships had little popular support and the Pakistani leadership questioned the U.S. and UK would commit to sustained support. Pakistan has also not realized that it has a serious internal problem, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), with Islamic fundamentalists and potential insurgents. The Pakistani military lacks counter-insurgency (COIN) capability and remains, both strategically and philosophically, focused on India. Understanding the different timelines for progress between the West and Pakistan, the UK noted that the Pakistanis largely perceive the fighting in the Northeast as a "Western war" and they would prefer to focus on India --

"their cold war."

¶4. (C) In describing its experiences with on-going COIN training, the UK said the Pakistani army should re-structure in light of its new and changing internal threats, but "all talk of transformation falls on deaf ears." The challenge is how to allow the Pakistani military to maintain focus on India, while making the army COIN capable. The Frontier Corps is the Pakistani-designated method of dealing with the problems in the FATA. The UK is trying to work within that framework, limited as it may be, to preserve and build Pakistani buy-in. The Frontier Corps has great intel potential and should be able to develop a basic command-and-control operation. Continuing work with the Frontier Corps concurrently with the Security and Development Plan (SDP) is the way to move forward and garner Pakistani support. The UK "has not gone soft on either, but recognizes it is deep sand."

"Enduring Engagement"

¶5. (C) In spite of the difficulties, the UK plans to continue efforts to build connections between the UK and Pakistani armies, which is a central institution for national stability. Bowen agreed there is "a shared sense of strategic ground even if there is frustration in dealing with it." He said, between the U.S. and the UK, "we have all the right elements, but we have not gotten all together yet." U.S.-UK "enduring engagement" is critical, especially as the SDP moves forward as the centerpiece of engagement with Pakistan.

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¶6. (C) Edelman was joined by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Central Asia Bobby Wilkes, Central Command J5 Major General Robert Allardice, Office of the Secretary of Defense UK Desk Officer Chris Beecroft, Military Assistant to the Under Secretary Colonel Tracy Warren, and poloff. Bowen was joined by Pakistan Strategy Unit Strategic Planner Captain Rupert Wallace, PDRS Lieutenant Colonel John White, CT and UKOps-Ad Ops 1 Colonel Simon Marr, PJHQ J5 Plans Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Bazeley, FCO Pakistan Team Leader Laura Hickey, and Bowen's Private Secretary Pete Thomas.

¶7. (U) Under Secretary Edelman cleared this cable.
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